DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 398 101 SO 026 329

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TITLE Michoacan People, Customs, and the Day of the Dead.
SPONS AGENCY Center for International Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 94
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Area Studies; Bilingual Education; Cultural Activities; *Death; Elementary Education; Foreign Countries; Grade 5; *Holidays; Intermediate Grades; *Latin American Culture; *Latin American History; Latin American Literature; Latin Americans; Multicultural Education; Mythology; *Social Studies
IDENTIFIERS *Dia de los Muertos; *Mexico (Michoacan)

ABSTRACT

This curriculum guide is intended: (1) to expose students to the people and customs of Michoacan, Mexico; (2) to explore the meaning of traditional Day of the Dead customs through hands-on experiences; and (3) to build the self-esteem of second language learners of Mexican descent. During the study, students whose primary language is Spanish read and respond to Purepecha Indian myths of Michoacan; research and prepare a presentation on the language and customs of the Purepecha Indians; and participate in Day of the Dead activities including art, theater, and cooking. Activities include a literature study, research project, and holiday celebration of the Day of the Dead. There are background notes on the Purepecha Indians and the Day of the Dead, along with a list of resources. Since much of this unit is activity-based, the evaluation of students is performance-based with students judged on their participation in and completion of the activities introduced. (EH)

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ED 398 101

Michoacán
People, Customs, and the Day of the Dead

How a culture reacts to death reveals who it looks at life.
--Nancy and Jerry Márquez

Tell me how you die and I'll tell you who you are.
--Octavio Paz

A Literature/Social Studies/Art Unit
Fifth Grade Bilingual/Sheltered Instruction Class

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By Mary Maulhardt
Fulbright-Hays Seminar Abroad
Mexico 1994

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Michoacán
People, Customs, and the Day of the Dead

LEARNING GOALS:
*To expose students to the people and customs of Michoacán, México
*To explore the meaning of traditional Day of the Dead customs through hands-on experiences
*To build self-esteem of second language learners of Mexican descent

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OBJECTIVES:
*Students whose primary language is Spanish will read and respond to Purépecha Indian myths of Michoacán
*Students will research and prepare a presentation on the language and customs of the Purépecha Indians
*Students will participate in various Day of the Dead activities including art, theater and cooking

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ACTIVITIES:
***Literature Study**
1)In small groups, have students read Inchátiro y Tacamba aloud, identifying setting, characters, plot, and theme of the story.
2)Have students respond individually to the story by drawing a scene and writing a descriptive paragraph of their drawing.
3)In same small groups, students can choose a scene to re-enact for the whole class.

***Research Project**
1)During independent or library time, allow students to research material such as Soy Purépecha to gather information on the language and culture of the Purépecha Indians of Michoacán.
2)Final Project might be a performance of a traditional dance, example of traditional costumes, sample of traditional food, or a written and/or oral report on one aspect of life in a Purépecha family.

***Holiday Celebration: The Day of the Dead**
(All of the following activities can be found in Indo-Hispanic Folk Art Traditions by Bobbi Salinas-Norman)
1)Build an alter in the classroom to be decorated on October 31st. Decorate with:
a)cut paper banners called papel picado (directions p.12-14)

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b)Day of Dead strip cutouts (directions p. 49)
handout included

Alter offerings may include:
apples, bag of bones, bananas, bread of the dead, glass of water, *calaca* finger and thumbprints, candles, marigolds, nuts, photos of departed, oranges, personal momentos, skeletons, soft drinks, corn *tortillas*, milk, tin toys, corn, cider, and Mexican chocolate

2)Make Calavera Catrina/Calavera Zapata string puppets and or masks (directions pp.55-61) *patterns included*

3)Create finger and thumbprint *calacas* or skulls (directions p. 67)

4)As a homework assignment have students bake Bread of the Dead (recipe p. 71-72)

5)As a cumulating activity teach students the traditional Day of the Dead Michoacán folk dance. *Dansa de los Viejitos* (The Dance of the Old Ones) to be performed in a school-wide assembly or from class to class (directions for the dance and costumes pp. 84-87) *costume patterns included*

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BACKGROUND
NOTES:

The Purépecha--When most people think of ancient civilizations of Mexico, the Aztec, Mayan, and possibly Olmec come to mind. There are, however, 56 different indigenous groups spread throughout Mexico descended from many ancient cultures besides these three. In the state of Michoacán (where a large percentage of immigrants to the United States originate from) the Tarascans are the ancient civilization from which the contemporary Purépecha Indians have descended. Many of the Purépecha continue to speak their native language "Purépecha" and wear a characteristic *rebozo* or shawl of dark blue or black.

The ancient seat of the Tarascan empire was centered around Lake Patzcuaro about an hour west of the current capitol of Morelia. They built temples and towns around the lake that were not conquered by the Aztecs during their reign of conquest. Today, one of the most famous observances of the Day of the Dead takes place on the island of Janitzio in the middle of Lake Patzcuaro.

The Day of the Dead--The Day of the Dead is a unique holiday which blends both pre-Hispanic and Christian (Catholic) customs. October 31st, All Hallows E'en, is the day when *angelitos* or spirits of dead children, come back to visit for a night. On November 1st, All Saints Day, and November 2nd, All Souls Day, the souls of adults who have died return for their visit

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with the living. The Day of the Dead differs significantly from Halloween celebrations. As Bobbi Salinas-Norman writes in Folk Art Traditions II:

> Halloween is based on a medieval European concept of death, and is populated by demons, witches (usually women), and other images of terror--all of the *negative*. The Day of the Dead, in contrast, is distinctly different. It is a uniquely Indo-Hispanic custom that demonstrates a strong sense of love and repect for one's ancestors; celebrates the continuance of life, family relationships, community solidarity; and even finds humor after death--all *positive* concepts! (p.4)

Through participating in Day of the Dead activities, children are given a chance to think about death and talk about experiences or fears they might have had regarding death. Instead of being something that is hushed and terrifying, death takes its natural place as a necessary part of life.

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EVALUATION:
Since so much of this unit is activity-based, the evaluation of students will be performance-based. Students will be judged on their participation in and completion of the activities introduced.

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RESOURCES:

Ancona, George. Pablo Remembers: The Fiesta of the Day of the Dead. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1993.

Ancona, George. Pablo Recuerda: La Fiesta del Dia de los Muertos. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1993.

Bellezas de Michoacán. México, D.F.: Editur, S.A.

Greenleigh and Beimler. The Days of the Dead. San Francisco: Collins, 1991.

Hernández, Ireneo Rojas. Pirekuas. Michoacán, México:Instituto Michoacano de Cultura, 1988.

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López, Román. Inchátiro y Tacamba. Michoacán, México: Instituto Michoacano de Cultura, 1988.

Mendoza, María de la Luz. Soy Purépecha. México, D.F.: Secretaria de Educación Pública, 1988.

Salinas-Norton, Bobbi. Indo-Hispanic Folk Art Traditions II. Oakland, CA: Piñata Publications, 1988.

Suggestion: Decorate *ofrenda* with cutouts.

Note: Older students can design their own patterns and cut all three strips at one time.

At Other Times of the Year: Use appropriate colors of tissue paper to cut Valentine's Day, Christmas, St. Patrick's Day, etc. motifs to decorate bulletin boards.

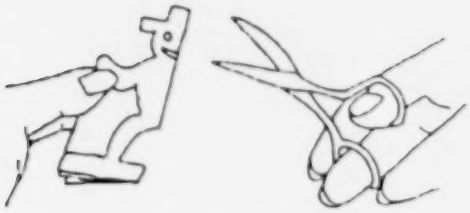
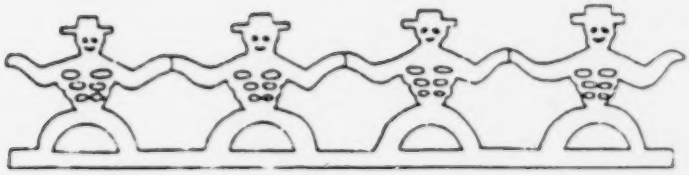
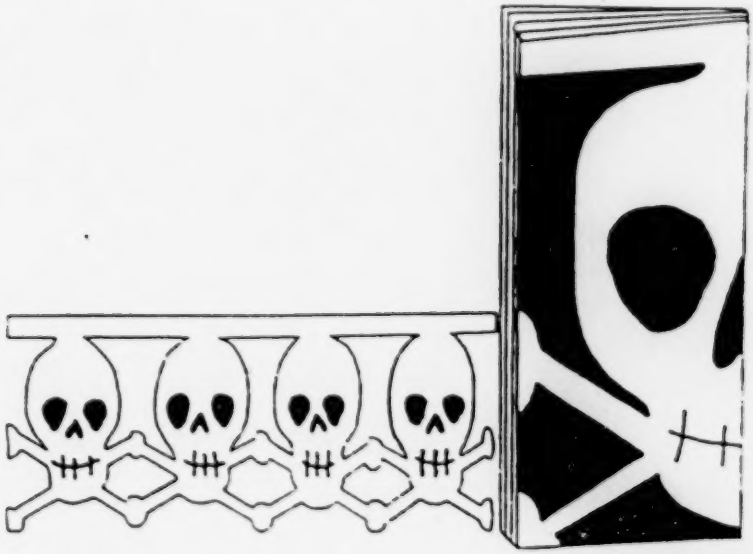
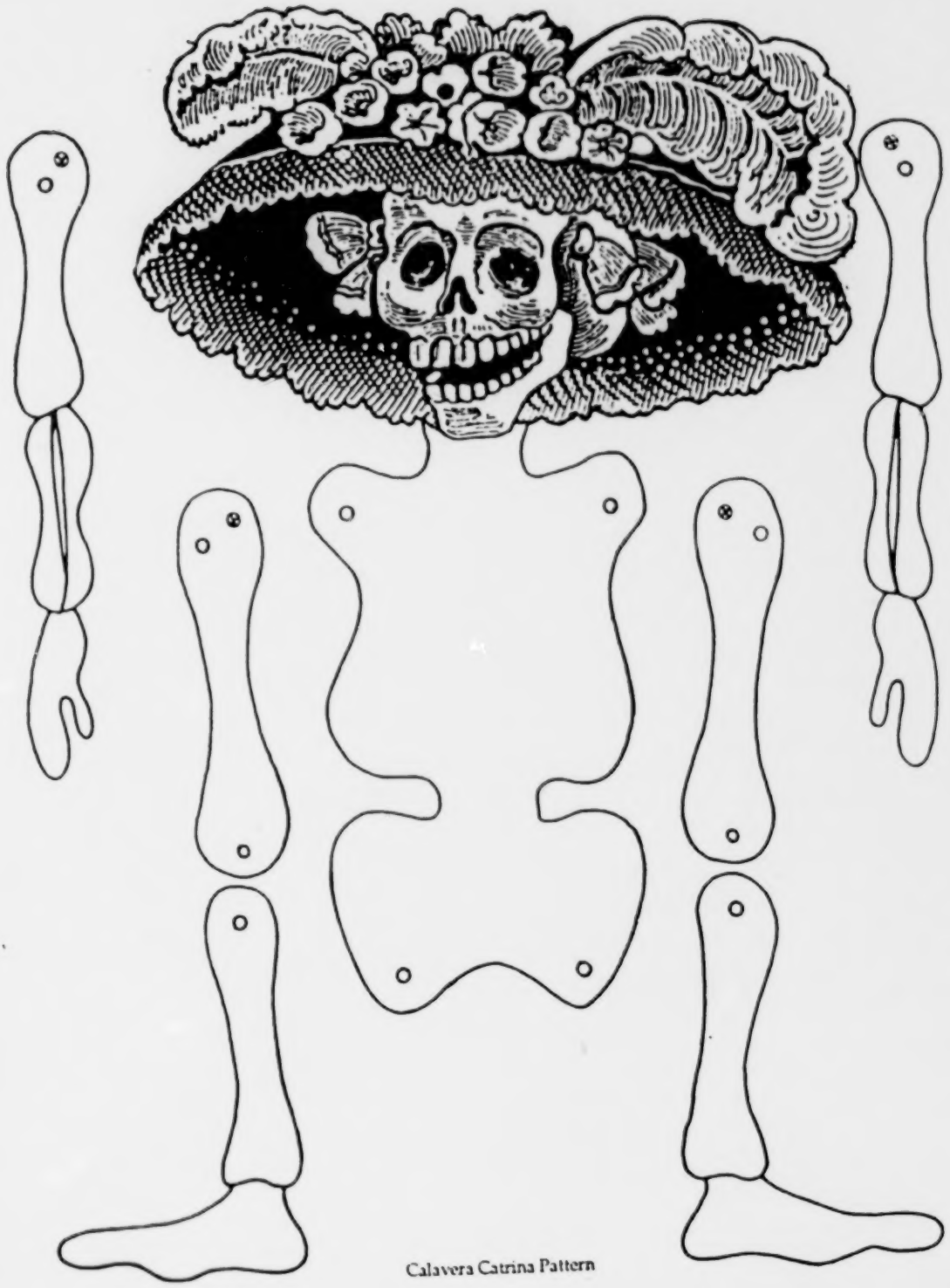


Illustration 4.







Calavera Catrina Pattern

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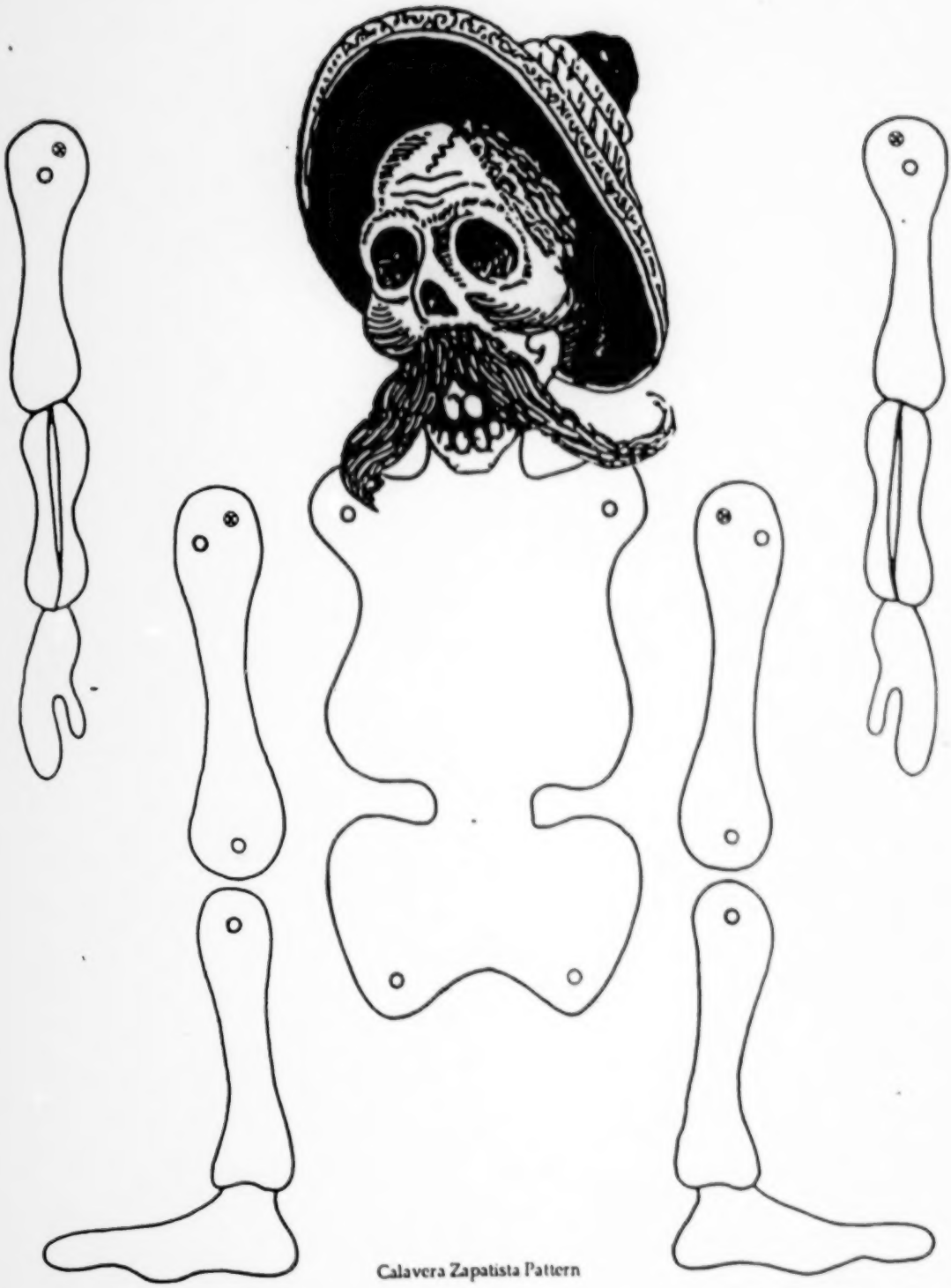

Calavera Zapatista Pattern

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enlarge pattern

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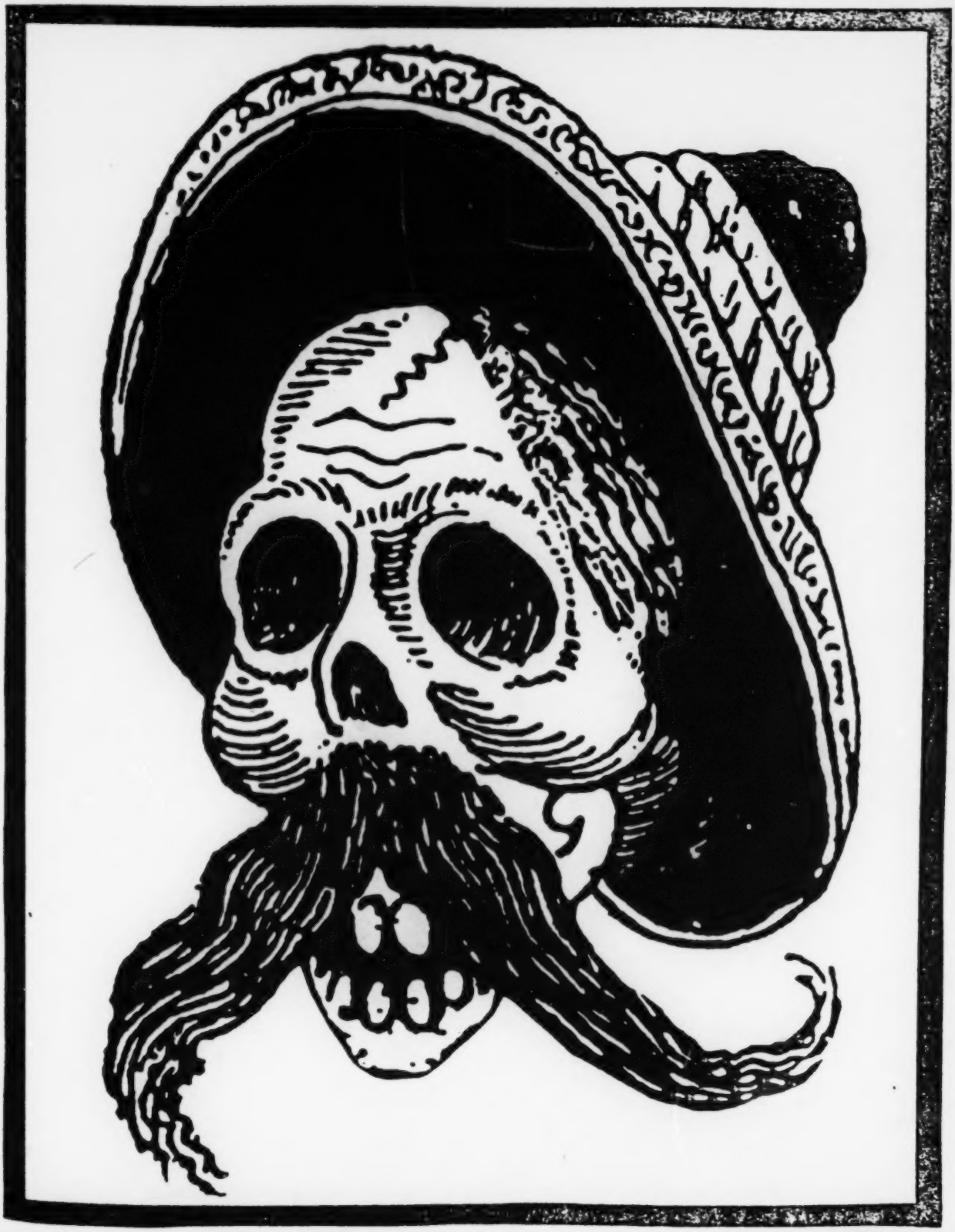
enlarge pattern



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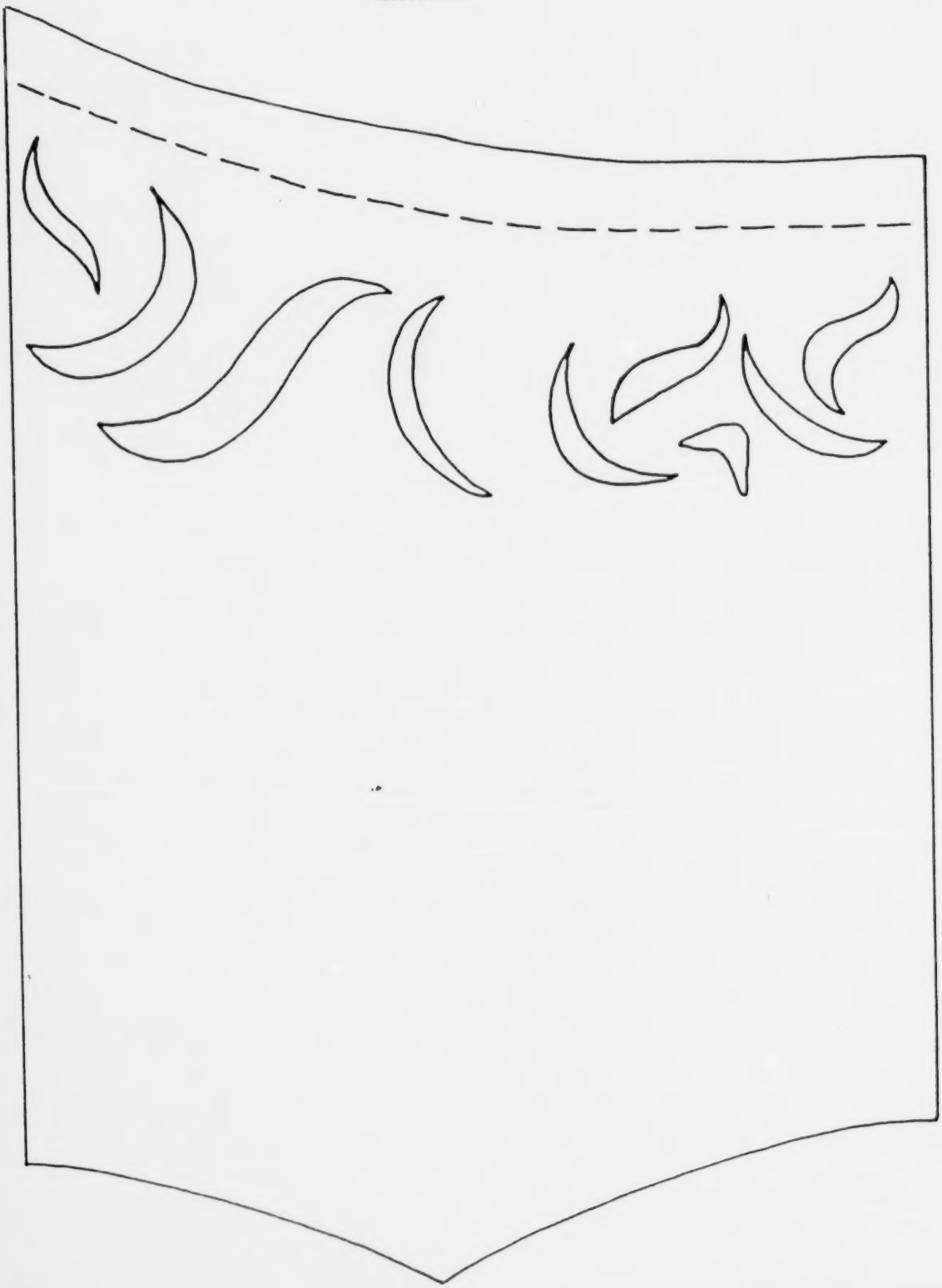
Boot Pattern



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Jarana Pattern